

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Commercial Fisheries

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For Immediate Release

FISHERY EXPERTS SCHEDULE OYSTER ROAST IN THE MERRY, BUT NON-R MONTH OF MAY

The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries does not usually promote social events, but has called attention to an oyster roast being held Sunday, May 2, on Chesapeake Bay.

The oyster roast is for some 500 delegates from Canada, Mexico and the United States attending the North American Fisheries Conference in Washington, D. C., from April 30 - May 5, and Bureau biologists point out there is no "R" in May.

Many times in the past the Bureau has described as a myth the belief that oysters are good to eat only during months that have an "R", adding that the seafood delicacy is at the peak of perfection in May and June.

Delegates to the Fisheries Conference, knowledgeable men in all phases of the fishing industry, will demonstrate that the "proof is in the eating" and expect to consume plenty of the tasty bivalves. Scientists and other employees of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries will be among those attending.

Dr. J. L. McHugh, the Bureau's Assistant Director for Biological Research, says "oysters are fatter and taste better in spring because at this time they begin to store glycogen, an animal starch, in preparation for the spawning season in summer."

During summer and early fall, he said, oysters become thinner, more watery, and the flavor declines. The fattening cycle usually does not resume until October or November.

Dr. McHugh said some of the origins of the "R" month myth may have been lost in history, but one apparent origin is the spawning habit of the European oyster. This oyster is unique in that its young are retained by the mother until tiny shells are developed. These gritty shells, like grains of sand, make the European oyster undesirable for human food during the non-R months, but this doesn't apply to American oysters. In the old days, also, refrigeration was not in common use. Oysters were likely to spoil in hot weather. With our modern methods of handling and preserving foods, danger from spoilage no longer exists.

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